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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing students' language arts skills by incorporating modeling and grade appropriate comprehension activities. The targeted population consisted of Kindergarten, 4th, and 6th grade students in a rural middle class community located in central Illinois. The problems with language arts skills were documented through motivational student surveys, comprehension assessment tools, and teacher checklists for literacy development. Literature review of solutions name reading strategies and instructional methods as ways to create solutions to the existing problems. Researchers focused on teaching students about reading logs, structural analysis, listening activities, predictions, context clues, comparisons, main ideas, using background knowledge and sequencing events. The researchers also included the use of guest readers, weekly visits to the library, and daily oral reading to motivate student interest in reading. The researchers collected data from students to reveal that this was an existing problem at the research sites. Students were given a Motivational Interest Survey and a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development at the onset of the research in order to reveal how students felt about their language arts abilities. Students kept a reading log and completed weekly comprehension activities to show their progress and growth throughout the intervention period. At the end of the research project, students were given the motivational survey and assessed on their growth by the Motivational Interest Survey and a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development. The post intervention data indicated an increase in student motivation to read and grade appropriate comprehension skills. Appendixes contain survey instruments, checklists, a comprehension assessment rubric, and a reading log rubric. (Contains 27 references and 27 figures of data.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING LANGUAGE ARTS SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF MODELING AND GRADE APPROPRIATE COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

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Kirsten A. Parr
David Wiles

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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Chicago, Illinois

May 2003

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The researchers collected data from students to reveal that this was an existing problem at the research sites. Students were given a Motivational Interest Survey and a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development at the onset of the research in order to reveal how students felt about their language arts abilities. Students kept a reading log and completed weekly comprehension activities to show their progress and growth throughout the intervention period. At the end of the research project, students were given the motivational survey and assessed on their growth by the Motivational Interest Survey and a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

The post intervention data indicated an increase in student motivation to read and grade appropriate comprehension skills.

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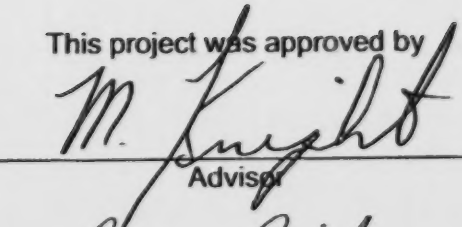

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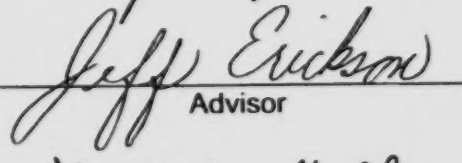

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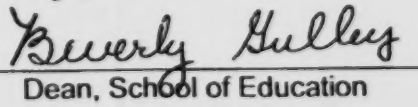

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted Kindergarten, fourth, and sixth grade levels demonstrate weaknesses in language arts skills such as a lack of interest in reading, poor reading comprehension, and word attack skills. This is evidenced by a Motivational Interest Survey, comprehension assessment tools, and a teacher Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project is being conducted in two buildings, an elementary and a middle school, of a single community district.

Site A is an elementary school consisting of grades pre-kindergarten through fourth grade. At the time of the research, the total student population is 425. The student population consists of 97.2% Caucasian, 1.2% African-American, 1.2% Asian, and 0.5% Hispanic. Site A has an attendance rate of 96.9%, a chronic truancy rate of 0.0%, and a mobility rate of 11.0%. The average class sizes at Site A are 21.8 students per class in kindergarten, 16.8 students per class in first grade, and 19.3 students per class in third grade.

Site B is a middle school consisting of fifth through eighth grade. At the time of the research, the student population is 333. The student population consists of 97.0% Caucasian, 1.5% Asian, 0.9% Hispanic, and 0.6% African-American. Site B has an attendance rate of 96.1%, a chronic truancy rate of 0.0%, and a mobility rate of 4.2%. The average class sizes at Site B are 22 students per class in sixth grade and 20.8 students per class in eighth grade.

The Classrooms

Classrooms 1 and 2 are housed in the elementary building at Site A. Classroom 1 is a self-contained, Kindergarten inclusion classroom with 20 students. In addition to the regular classroom teacher, a special education teacher spends approximately two hours per day in this room. Classroom 2 is a self-contained fourth grade class with 21 students. The school day for each of these classrooms consists of approximately six hours of instruction, beginning at 8:30 a.m. and lasting until 3:15 each day.

Classrooms 3 and 4 are housed in the middle school building at site B. These two classrooms are departmentalized sixth grade classes where instruction of two sections of English grammar, two sections of literature, and one section each of spelling and social studies occurs. Each section lasts 45 minutes and has approximately 25 students.

The School District

After a fire destroyed the original school building for the district in 1953, classes were held in half-day sessions at a building consisting of three classrooms. Additional classrooms were added in 1954, 1960, and 1970. This original building is Site A for the

district. Due to further growth, the need for an additional facility was evident. A bond referendum was passed in 1977 to secure funds to build a new junior high building. This building opened in 1980. This building, which has also been added onto for additional classroom space, is Site B.

The district, which encompasses Site A and Site B, employs 52 certified staff members, 86.5% of which are female and 13.5% are male. The district's teacher racial and ethnic background is 100.0% Caucasian. The district has an average teaching experience of 14.6 years, of those, 16.5% have completed a Master's Degree and above. Teachers' salaries average $38, 769, while administrator's average $76,460. (State of Illinois Report Card, 2001)

Site A consists of one building, with four self-contained classrooms within each of the grade levels. Students receive instruction in physical education on a daily basis, with art, library, and music on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Site B consists of one building, with fifth grade being self-contained. Sixth grade is departmentalized for English, literature, science, and math. Seventh and eighth grades are conducted in a junior high, departmentalized setting with students following individualized schedules. All students in grades fifth through eighth receive additional instruction in computers, physical education, and band or chorus on a weekly basis.

The Surrounding Community

Site A and B are located in a rural setting, approximately 10 miles northeast of Peoria, Illinois. This single community district consists predominantly of white collar, two parent family homes. The business community is made up of small, retail

establishments with no major industrial centers in the immediate area. The community also encompasses four Christian churches.

The residential community consists of apartments, duplexes, and single-family dwellings. The median household income for the area is $61,060. The average value of a home is $116,804.

The school district has a high level of community involvement, which is demonstrated through the support of: local businesses, Parent Teacher Organizations, Women's Club, Mom's In Touch, and PALS. There is strong support given to the district by the Citizen's Advisory Council. This council has completed survey documentation to assess the values and needs of the community. For example, a recent addition of full day kindergarten from half-day was explored and documented by the council. This needs assessment by the Citizen's Advisory Council was conducted for the community and the perceived needs of the area. The information gathered was reviewed and acted upon by the district's school board, which resulted in the adoption of full-day kindergarten.

Regional and National Context of the Problem

The problem of improving language arts skills has generated concern at the local, state, and federal levels. In the history of education, few topics have sparked such public debate as the teaching of reading. "Because reading is at the heart of every child's learning, it has been a principal educational focus for more than a century. Research on reading dates as far back as 1879, when a paper was published on eye movements in reading." Samuels & Kamil, 1984 (as cited in North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, p.1, 1999)

The federal government has addressed the importance of reading by enacting the Reading Excellence Act. The Senate passed this bill on October 6th, 1998.

> The act defines the term *reading* as a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following: (a) the skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print; (b) the ability to decode unfamiliar words; (c) the ability to read fluently; (d) sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension; (e) the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print; (f) the development and maintenance of a motivation to read. (Goodman, p. 5, 2002)

"In the U.S., 10 million students are classified as poor readers. According to the NAEP 1998 Reading Report Card, 68 percent of 4th graders in high poverty areas fall into this category. In addition, 35 percent of U.S. kindergartners begin school unprepared to read. Policymakers have taken to heart such statistics, and 20 state legislatures have recently passed child literacy laws." (Tell, p.7, 2002) With the amount of poor readers that have been identified in our country, Lerner found a "generally accepted estimate that reading disability accounts for about 80 percent of all learning disabilities, which indicates that 3.54 percent of all schoolchildren in the U.S. are ostensibly receiving services for a reading disability. This works out to be approximately 2,046,254 students." (as cited in Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998)

When you think about the preceding numbers, it makes you wonder how our country does globally. The U.S. had an average score on a new 32-nation study of educational achievement. There are many good readers in this country, but as the

numbers show, there are many poor readers as well. There is no in-between. "The gap between America's best readers and its worst is wider than in any other country." (Hoff, p. 7, 2001) The article goes on to say that, "Students leave the primary grades as competent readers steeped in the basics, but many fail to refine and build on their skills as they move through middle and high school."

Other research has shown that the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has many concerns with children learning to read properly. Why would a health organization be so concerned with a child learning to read? "If a youngster does not learn to read in our literacy driven society, hope for a fulfilling productive life diminishes. In short, difficulties learning to read are not only an educational problem, they constitute a serious health concern." (Lyon, p. 14, 1998) Lyon goes on to quote three basic areas of reading questions that the NICHD reading research has uncovered. They include:

(1) How do children learn to read English (and other languages)? What are the critical skills, abilities, environments, and instructional interactions that foster the fluent reading of text?

(2) What skill deficits and environmental factors impede reading development?

(3) For which children are which instructional approaches most beneficial, at which stages of reading development?

Keeping these three areas in mind, we as educators need to continue to focus on improving our teaching in the area of language arts.

By definition, reading is comprehension. A person who enjoys reading is actively involved in and has a purpose to read. "Research over 30 years has shown that

instruction in comprehension can help students understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read." (Text Comprehension Instruction, p. 1, 2002)

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Reading comprehension is vital in the lives of all people. How can we instill the love of reading in a way so that all students understand? How can we, as teachers, make reading exciting so that all students will be motivated to want to pick up a book in their free time? Why are some students more interested in reading than others, when it is such an essential component to succeeding in school and life? The answers to these questions have been stumping teachers over time.

When deciding on a topic for the action research project, the researchers met to evaluate the needs and areas, which they felt needed to be addressed in their classrooms. The researchers discussed: the fact that students do not seem to be excited to read; students would rather sit and do nothing instead of picking up a book to read, which leads to student behavioral problems; poor comprehension skills when reading across all curriculum areas; lack of spelling and vocabulary development in everyday oral and written language; and the lack of role models to demonstrate an enthusiasm for reading. These concerns were present in both of the previously mentioned research sites.

As language arts teachers, the researchers felt an underlying need to address reading comprehension and the lack of motivation to read by students. Reading touches every grade level and every subject area, and if students can succeed in reading they can experience success in anything they attempt. The research team felt there was a need to increase motivation and comprehension skills through incorporating various methods into their classrooms.

The researchers administered a Motivational Interest Survey to 19 Kindergarten students and 24 fourth grade students at Site A, as well as 96 sixth grade students at Site B (Appendix A). This survey originally had fourteen questions, of which the researchers focused on six. These six included: How often would you like your teacher to read to the class? Do you like to read books by yourself? Do you tell your friends about books and stories you read? Do you like to read during your free time? Do you take books home from school to read? Do you like to write? The researchers felt that these six questions addressed the areas that were identified as areas of concern.

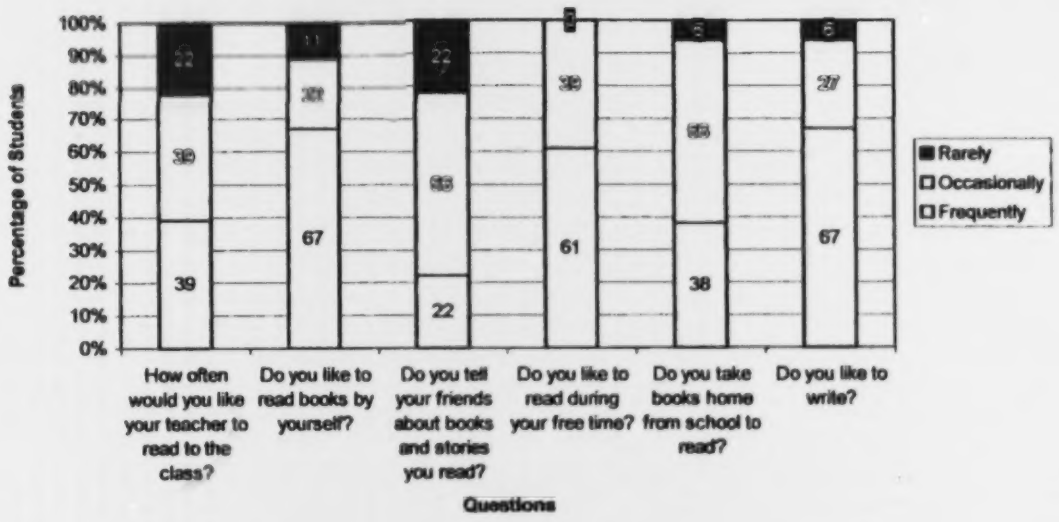

Figure 2.1. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Motivational Interest Survey.

On the Motivational Interest Survey, Kindergarten students could respond in one of three ways: frequently, occasionally, and rarely. Responses of "frequently" or "occasionally" were considered to be positive responses, while a response of "rarely" was viewed as a negative response. When asked, "How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?" 78% of Kindergarteners responded in a positive manner. Eighty-nine percent of these students responded positively to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" In regards to the question, "Do you tell your friends about books and stories that you read?" 78% responded positively. When asked, "Do you like to read during your free time?" 100% responded in a positive manner. Ninety-four percent of students responded positively to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" In regards to the question, "Do you like to write?" 94% responded positively.

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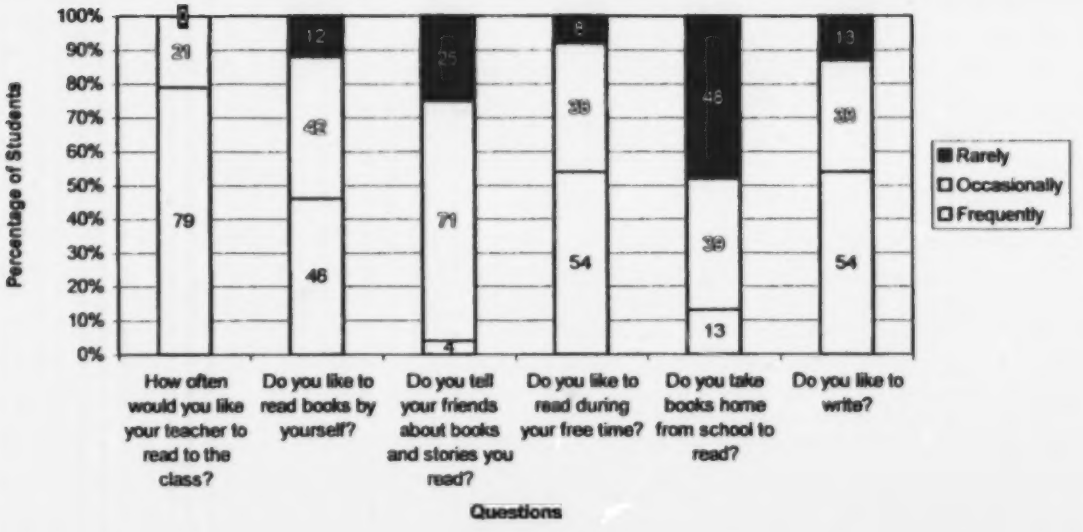

Figure 2.2. Responses by fourth grade students on the Motivational Interest Survey.

On the Motivational Interest Survey, fourth grade students could respond in one of three ways: frequently, occasionally, and rarely. Responses of "frequently" or "occasionally" were considered to be positive responses, while a response of "rarely" was viewed as a negative response. When asked, "How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?" 100% of fourth graders responded in a positive manner. Eighty-eight percent of these students responded positively to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" In regards to the question, "Do you tell your friends about books and stories that you read?" 75% responded positively. When asked, "Do you like to read during your free time?" 92% responded in a positive manner. Fifty-two percent of students responded positively to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" In regards to the question, "Do you like to write?" 87% responded positively.

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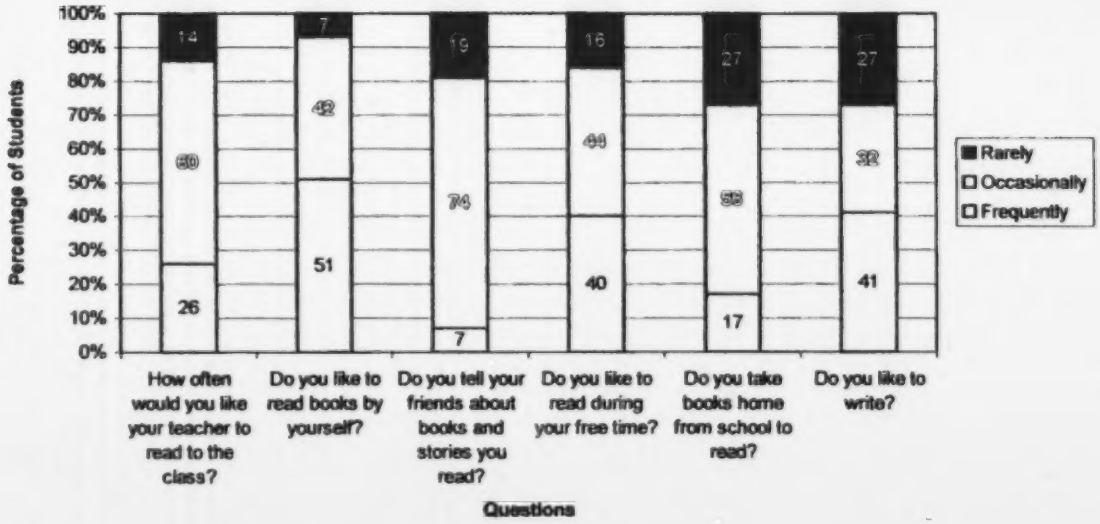

Figure 2.3. Responses by sixth grade students on the Motivational Interest Survey.

On the Motivational Interest Survey, sixth grade students could respond in one of three ways: frequently, occasionally, and rarely. Responses of "frequently" or "occasionally" were considered to be positive responses, while a response of "rarely" was viewed as a negative response. When asked, "How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?" 86% of sixth graders responded in a positive manner. Ninety-three percent of these students responded positively to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" In regards to the question, "Do you tell your friends about books and stories that you read?" 81% responded positively. When asked, "Do you like to read during your free time?" 84% responded in a positive manner. Seventy-three percent of students responded positively to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" In regards to the question, "Do you like to write?" 73% responded positively.

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The second pre-test the researchers administered was a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development (Appendix B), which was broken down into two parts. These parts were: Concepts of Print (Appendix C) and Comprehension of Text (Appendix D, Appendix E). These pre-tests were administered to 19 Kindergarten students and 24 fourth grade students at Site A, and 96 sixth grade students at Site B.

Prior to administering the Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, the fourth and sixth grade teachers adapted this checklist to be more grade appropriate and easier to administer to a large group of students in a shorter amount of time. The Concepts of Print portion of the assessment focused on the following skills: knows print is read from left to right; knows what a letter is, and can point one out; knows what a word is, and can point one out; demonstrates knowledge of short vowel sounds; demonstrates knowledge of long vowel sounds; and demonstrates knowledge of phonetic rules.

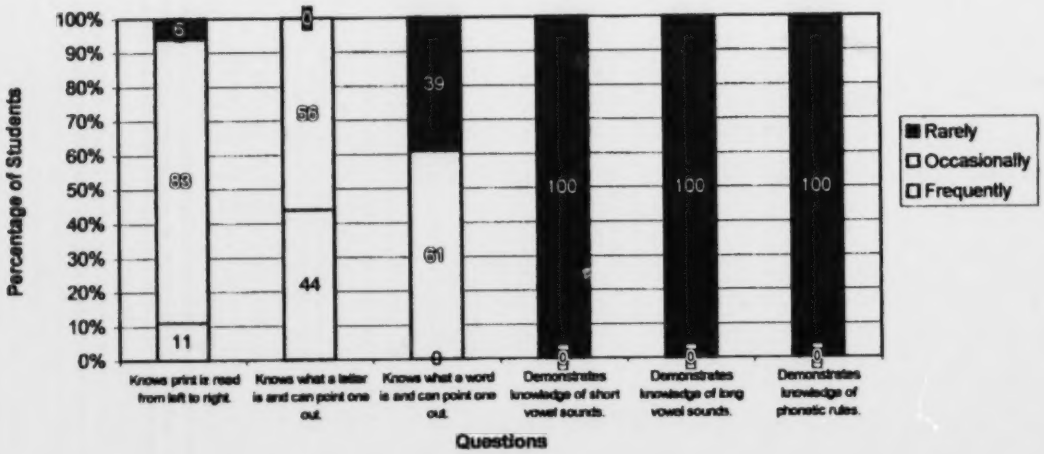

Figure 2.4. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Concepts of Print portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

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On the Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, Kindergarten students were assessed by one of the researchers as demonstrating each targeted skill frequently, occasionally, or rarely. Assessments of "frequently" or "occasionally" were considered by the researchers to be mastered or progressing skills, while an assessment of "rarely" was viewed as an undeveloped skill. When assessing students on the skill of knowing that print is read from left to right, 94% of Kindergarten students showed developed skills. One hundred percent of these students showed mastery or progression of the skill of knowing what a letter is and could point one out. In regards to the skill of knowing what a word is and being able to point one out, 61% showed progressing knowledge. When researchers assessed the skills of demonstrating knowledge of short vowel sounds, long vowel sounds, and other phonetic rules, 0% of Kindergarten students had no development of skills.

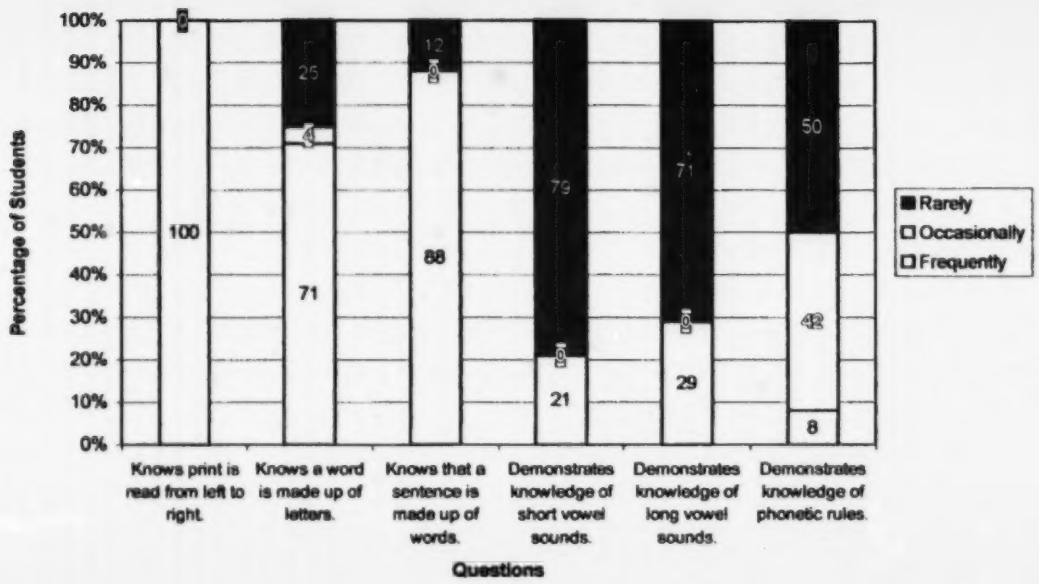

Figure 2.5. Responses by fourth grade students on the Concepts of Print portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

On the Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, fourth grade students were assessed by one of the researchers as demonstrating each targeted skill frequently, occasionally, or rarely. Assessments of "frequently" or "occasionally" were considered by the researchers to be mastered or progressing skills, while an assessment of "rarely" was viewed as an undeveloped skill. When assessing students on the skill of knowing that print is read from left to right, 100% of fourth grade students showed developed skills. Seventy-five percent of these students showed mastery or progression of the skill of knowing that a word is made up of letters. In regards to knowing that a sentence is made up of words, 88% showed progressing knowledge. When researchers assessed the skills of demonstrating knowledge of short

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vowel sounds, 21% of fourth grade students were successful. Twenty-nine percent of students successfully demonstrated knowledge of long vowel sounds. When assessing other phonetic rules, 50% of fourth grade students had mastered or progressing skills.

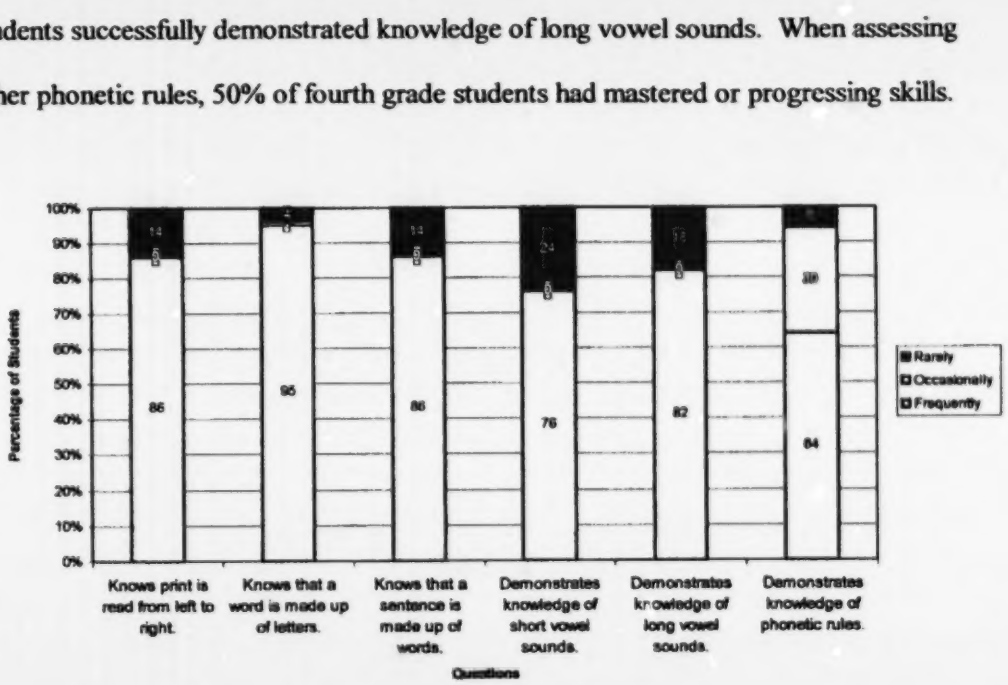

Figure 2.6. Responses by sixth grade students on the Concepts of Print portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

On the Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, sixth grade students were assessed by one of the researchers as demonstrating each targeted skill frequently, occasionally, or rarely. Assessments of "frequently" or "occasionally" were considered by the researchers to be mastered or progressing skills, while an assessment of "rarely" was viewed as an undeveloped skill. When assessing students on the skill of knowing that print is read from left to right, 86% of sixth grade students showed developed skills. Ninety-six percent of these students showed mastery or progression of the skill of knowing that a word is made up of letters. In regards to knowing that a sentence is made up of words, 86% showed progressing knowledge. When researchers assessed the skills of demonstrating knowledge of short

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vowel sounds, 76% of sixth grade students were successful. Eighty-two percent of students successfully demonstrated knowledge of long vowel sounds. When assessing other phonetic rules, 94% of sixth grade students had mastered or progressing skills.

Finally, the researchers adapted the Comprehension of Text section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development for the fourth (Appendix D) and sixth grade students (Appendix E). Teachers adapted this checklist to relate to a specific story that was read in class. The Comprehension of Text portion of the assessment focused on the following skills: identifying main characters, relating the setting, identifying the main events, responding to the text with interpretive comments or questions, and responding to the text with critical comments or questions.

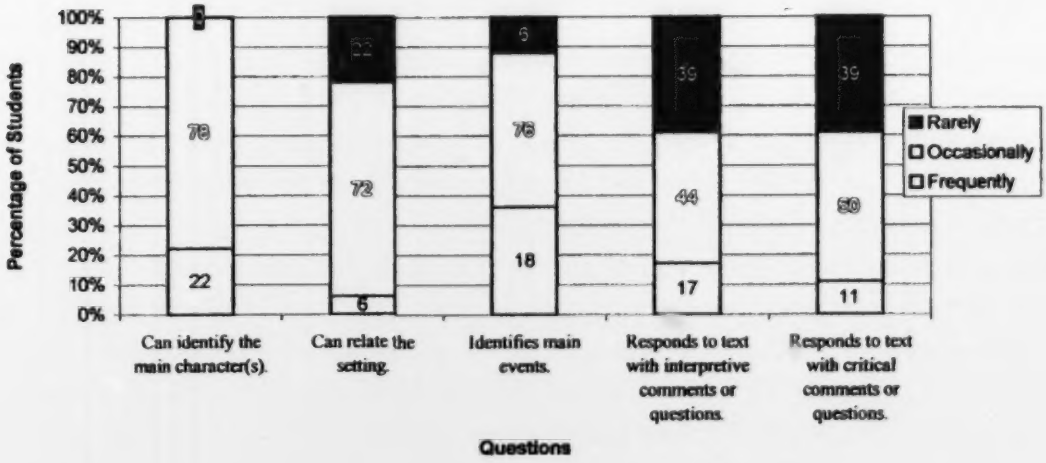

Figure 2.7. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Comprehension of Text portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

On the Comprehension of Text portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, Kindergarten students were assessed by one of the researchers as

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demonstrating each targeted skill frequently, occasionally, or rarely. Assessments of "frequently" or "occasionally" were considered by the researchers to be mastered or progressing skills, while an assessment of "rarely" was viewed as an undeveloped skill. When assessing students on the skill of identifying the main characters, 100% of Kindergarten students showed developing skills. Seventy-eight percent of these students showed mastery or progression of identifying the setting of a story. In regards to identifying main events, 94% showed progressing knowledge. When researchers assessed how students responded to text with interpretive comments or questions, 61% of Kindergarten students were successful. 61% of students successfully responded to text with critical comments or questions.

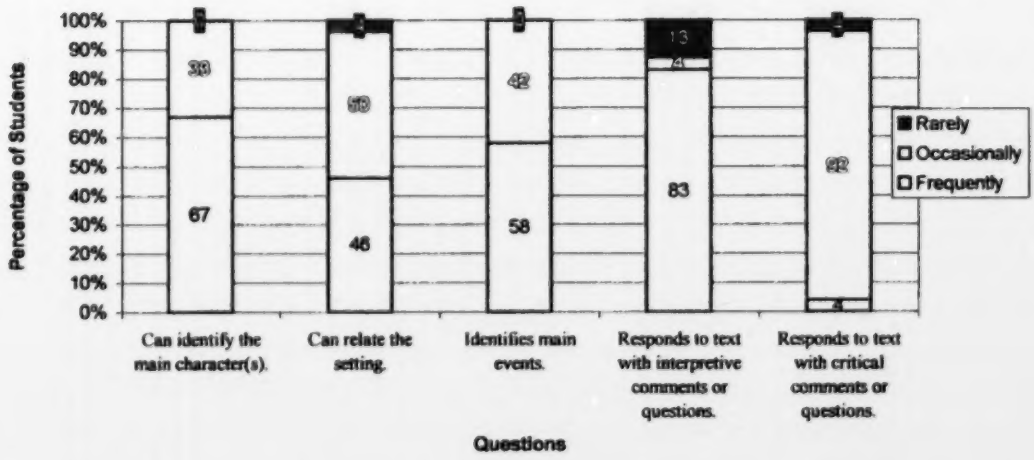

Figure 2.8. Responses by fourth grade students on the Comprehension of Text portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

On the Comprehension of Text portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, fourth grade students were assessed by one of the researchers as

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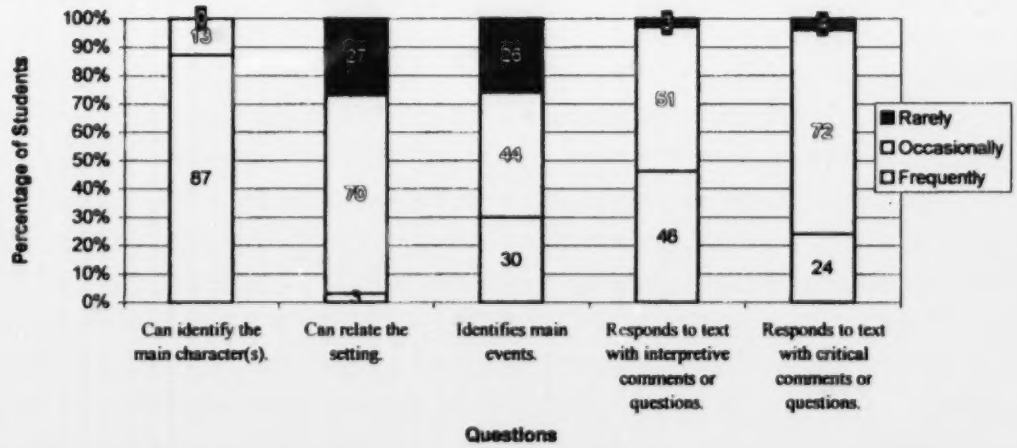

Figure 2.9. Responses by sixth grade students on the Comprehension of Text portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

On the Comprehension of Text portion of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, sixth grade students were assessed by one of the researchers as demonstrating each targeted skill frequently, occasionally, or rarely. Assessments of

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"frequently" or "occasionally" were considered by the researchers to be mastered or progressing skills, while an assessment of "rarely" was viewed as an undeveloped skill. When assessing students on the skill of identifying the main characters, 100% of sixth grade students showed developing skills. Seventy-three percent of these students showed mastery or progression of identifying the setting of a story. In regards to identifying main events, 74% showed progressing knowledge. When researchers assessed how students responded to text with interpretive comments or questions, 97% of sixth grade students were successful. Ninety-six percent of students successfully responded to text with critical comments or questions.

Probable Causes

The lack of appropriate language arts skills such as a lack of interest in reading, poor reading comprehension, and word attack skills is an ongoing concern for educators across all grade levels. Many educators have been concerned about the decline in interest in reading by students. The literature suggests several underlying causes for this lack of language arts skills in students. Peterson stated, "When a student has difficulty reading, no other lesson is more important" (Peterson, C. p. 4, 2002). Unfortunately that is not the case is many households today.

The lack of interest and time for reading is a cause for concern. Less emphasis is being placed on reading in the family unit today, because more time is spent and more importance is often placed on outside activities. "Middle school students are busier than ever these days" (Peterson, C. p. 4, 2002). Less time is also being spent on reading in the classroom, "...students read an average of only 78 minutes daily...(and) struggling readers read even less" (Ihnot, p.1, 1995). Reading is a skill that must be utilized as often

as possible so that the learner is successful. "Reading is a skill that must be used every day" (Anderson, p.10, 2001). When looking to the other interests of students, television shows and computer programs often take priority over reading, yet "none of these media engages the mind and the senses as reading does" (Anderson, p. 10, 2001).

Environmental factors and the lack of role models who emulate reading as an important pastime and skill also help to contribute to the lack of language arts skills. "Students who are not successful in the classroom have not had experiences with language in meaningful situations" (Holloway, p. 80, 1999). Parents are often too busy to take the time to read to their children or to model the importance of reading in the home. There are many environmental factors in today's society. They can include influences within the community, neighborhood, or within the home. Noise pollution is one environmental factor that could affect reading skills. "Children who live in noisy areas have poorer reading skills than those in quieter areas" (Kiernan, p.5, 1997). Simply not having age appropriate or skill appropriate reading material available in the home is an environmental contributor to poor reading skills. Some children are not given the opportunities to experience reading activities, such as visiting a library, listening to a storyteller, visiting a bookstore, or being involved in a book club.

"Children who do not develop into adequate readers will be virtually crippled in today's modern society" (McGee, p. 1, 2001). Basic reading skills are the backbone of language arts abilities. Therefore, a deficit in reading skills will affect all areas of language arts, such as comprehension and word attack skills. While the testing devices used by teachers may vary, the evaluation tools show the reading skill areas where students need improvement. "A low score on any standardized measure of reading can be

the first red flag that a child is having trouble in reading, and teachers are encouraged to follow up with individual diagnostic tests" (Peterson, D., & VanDerWege, p. 2, 2002). Once the deficit areas are defined for each student, it becomes much easier for the teacher to target and address the language arts skills that need to be strengthened. Teachers are always looking for new and innovative ways to encourage reading and improve language arts skills in their students.

In short, while there are many factors that can play a part in poor language arts skills, three main causes were identified as the research focus. The causes identified are: the lack of interest and time for reading, the lack of role models and positive environmental factors, and the lack of basic reading skills. According to Paulo Freire, "Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather it is preceded by, and intertwined with knowledge of the world" (Shelton, p. 1, 2002).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Comprehension is essential for student achievement in reading. "The main purpose for reading is to comprehend the ideas in the material. Without comprehension, reading would be empty and meaningless." (Casper, Catton, & Westfall, p. 1, 1998) In order to properly motivate the student to achieve the personal satisfaction that comes from reading, and to increase comprehension while reading, research shows a variety of methods that may be used in the classroom and in the home.

There are a wide variety of instructional practices that can be used to help increase student comprehension. Teachers fortify their language arts curriculum by using the following strategies both frequently and infrequently. Common methods used today include: book clubs or literature circles, readers' theatre, reading poetry aloud, or author studies (Mahaffey, p. 1, 2002). In addition, students could engage in: choral reading, tape-assisted reading, and partner reading (Fluency Instruction, p.5, 2002).

Book clubs or literature circles engage a small group of students in discussion evolving from a chosen story that is read by all. In these groups, peer discussion is

utilized to enhance student comprehension. Students are also given an opportunity to identify and relate to their peers through discussion and personal reflection on the reading selection.

"In readers' theatre, students rehearse and perform a play for peers or others. They read from scripts that have been derived from books that are rich in dialogue. Readers' theatre also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing." (Fluency Instruction, p. 6, 2002) Teachers utilize readers' theatre in their classrooms by assigning characters and roles to the students who then become more familiar with the reading. This practice provides students with a meaningful experience with text that will help to improve comprehension through rehearsal.

Many teachers read poetry aloud to their students and encourage their students to work with poetry on a regular basis. This helps the student to "learn to enjoy the sounds of the language." (Mahaffey, p. 1, 2002) The use of descriptive language helps the students to create a mental picture of what the author was trying to convey. Students will become more familiar with the use of figurative language (i.e. similes and metaphors) by reading and listening to poetry, which will help their comprehension skills when reading. Classroom discussion can also evolve and be a powerful tool when personal interpretation of the reading comes to light.

Author studies are often integrated into the classroom to increase student motivation to read more titles by the same author. In depth focus can look to: the themes behind the stories, the way the author relays the story, similarities and differences between tales, and a focus on character traits that may recur through one or more of the

stories. Being familiar with different authors allows the student to choose personal reading material that they feel strongly about and know that they will enjoy.

Choral reading, tape-assisted reading, and partner reading are all strategies by which readers listen to peers, teachers, or other adults read fluently. "One on one tutoring programs that tap community volunteers and college students to help improve children's reading skills can be highly effective..." (Manzo, p. 1, 2001) Listening to others read allows the student to hear inflection of words during oral reading. A good storyteller captivates the audience by using his or her voice to relay a message from the text. These strategies allow students to practice their inflection and oral reading skills. By reading aloud, students can also use their senses to build comprehension.

The aforementioned intervention strategies are all instructional practices that could be used in the classroom. While these methods are viable and important, this study will focus on the introduction of the following intervention strategies into the classroom: daily oral reading, guest readers, reading logs/reflection journals, and weekly visits to the library.

Daily oral reading in the classroom is an important component of the curriculum. Teachers often read parts or whole fictional stories to their classes, along with non-fiction material that may relate to other curriculum areas. "Our instructional goal should be to prepare students to comprehend texts of all lengths and all genres through the skillful application of appropriate skills and strategies". (Sigmon, p. 1, 2002) The importance of reading both in the classroom and in the home has been addressed by the United States Department of Educational Research and Improvement in 1993 by saying, "Read aloud: this is the single most important thing you can do for your children."

Material that is read aloud should be widely varied in style, genre, and length. A teacher does not necessarily need to read a complete work to spark the interest of a child. "Teachers should view the read-aloud time as their greatest opportunity to advertise and market books to students. This is when students will learn what's in the room that they might want to read. Teachers must embrace the idea that there's a book for every student—a perfect book that they'll love—and that teachers must be relentless in finding the books that might be the key to unlock that door for students." (Sigmon, p. 2, 2002) Motivation, or a lack thereof, to read materials that interest the student is an issue that all teachers deal with in their classrooms on a daily basis.

"Guest readers expose students to a variety of people and reading materials." (Guest Readers, p. 55, 2002) By introducing a guest reader program into the classroom, teachers engage students by becoming excited about the literature they are exposed to and the means by which it is presented. Students may also gain self-esteem by having their family members, or someone they look up to and respect, become a guest reader in their classroom. A guest reader may engage some students to listen more actively simply by presenting the text in a different manner from the normal classroom routine. By establishing a practice of having guest readers in the classroom, students gain: critical listening skills, comprehension skills, an appreciation for visitors, appropriate behavior when someone who is not part of the normal classroom environment joins the group, and an opportunity to enjoy being read to in a relaxed, caring environment.

The use of reflection journals has become an integral part of instructional reading in the classroom. Writing is an important part of comprehension, and responding to the literature in written form helps students to build comprehension strategies that will

help them when they read. "Reading and writing exist only in relation to each other." (Cobine, p. 1, 1995) "If writing is half of a reading/writing equation, then reading taught together with writing would logically accommodate all reading styles. First of all, by writing while reading, students could learn to organize their thoughts." Wells study (as cited in Cobine, G., 1995) "Second of all, after habitually writing in response to reading, they could learn to clarify and refine their thoughts." Brookes study (as cited in Cobine, G., 1995). The practice of responding to literature in written form accommodates and provides for varied learning styles in the classroom. The use of reflection journals or response journals helps the reader to read more carefully, look for details, and comprehend the text. "Reflective writing that provides students with strategies for organizing information is one way to help deepen their understanding. It encourages them to think critically about information and view information from new perspectives." (Feathers, p. 100, 1993)

A literacy rich environment, and access to such, is important to the student's development of language arts skills. These environments may be: the classroom library, school district library, or public library. "When K-12 students have access to a well-staffed, high-quality media center, their test scores tend to go up." (Guerard, p. 1, 2000) "With training, teachers in print rich environments are more likely to engage in reading aloud, to link reading and writing activities, to promote books and reading, to provide high interest reading, and to plan trips to the library, all of which contribute to reading achievement and motivation." (Haycock, p. 1, 2001) Research has shown that access to libraries and books in the classroom makes a significant impact on students' learning. "The bottom line is...that once again, we've shown a positive and statistically significant

correlation between the size of the school library and library media staff and test scores," said Keith Curry Lance, the director of the Library Service Center of the Colorado State Library (Manzo, p.1, 2000).

In short, the previously mentioned intervention strategies will be the focus of this research study: daily oral reading, guest readers, reading logs/reflection journals, and weekly visits to the library.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of modeling oral reading and focusing on the importance of reading appreciation, during the period of August 2002 to December 2002, the kindergarten, fourth, and sixth grade classes will show an increase in their language arts skills, as measured by a review of the Motivational Interest surveys, weekly reading logs, and the teacher Checklists for Assessing Literacy Development.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Create weekly reading log and reflection journal for individual students.
2. Create the Motivational Interest Survey.
3. Motivational Interest surveys will be administered to the kindergarten, fourth, and sixth grade students who are participating in the group's intervention (pre-assessment).
4. Class time will be allotted at the discretion of the teacher for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.
5. Establish a routine for having guest readers in the classroom.
6. Guest readers will visit each classroom on a weekly basis at a time determined by the teacher.
7. Allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.

8. Allow class time for weekly reading log and reflection journal work.

9. Post-test will be administered to all students who have participated in the intervention: Motivational Interest Survey.

As a result of the use of a variety of grade appropriate comprehension activities, during the period of August 2002 to December 2002, the Kindergarten, fourth, and sixth grade classes will show an increase in their language arts skills, as measured by a review of weekly comprehension assessments and the teacher Checklists for Assessing Literacy Development.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Select specific grade appropriate language arts skills to focus on each week.

2. Choose and copy specific comprehension excerpts for each grade level for weekly comprehension assessments.

3. Create a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

4. Teachers will use the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development (pre-test).

5. Weekly comprehension activities and assessments will be completed at each teacher's discretion.

6. Post-test will be administered to all students who have participated in the intervention: Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development.

Action Plan

This action plan is intended to improve language arts skills through the use of modeling and grade appropriate comprehension activities. Using this specific plan over the designated fourteen weeks of intervention, students will be given ample time to learn and grow.

WEEK #1

- Teacher will send introductory letter home about the intended research project.
- Teacher should receive signed release forms by Friday, August 23, 2002.
- Students will be asked to get a grade appropriate book that is approved by the teacher by the start of week 3.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #2

- Teacher will explain research to parents at the school curriculum night.
- Teacher will administer the Motivational Interest Survey pre-test.
- Teacher will administer the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development as a pre-test.
- Teacher will compile data from the survey and checklist that were given as pre-tests.
- Teacher will establish a schedule for having a guest reader visit the classroom on a weekly basis.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #3

- Teacher will demonstrate a sample reading log entry.
- Teacher will show and explain the rubrics to be used throughout the intervention.
- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice using the stem choices to be used in the logs. This will set the purpose for reading.
- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.

- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.

- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.

- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.

- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.

- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #4

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice using phonetic skills.

- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.

- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.

- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.

- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.

- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.

- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.

- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #5

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice using critical listening and thinking skills.

- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.

- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.
- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.
- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.
- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.
- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #6

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice using predictions to verify outcomes.
- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.
- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.
- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.
- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.
- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.
- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #7

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice using context clues.
- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.

- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.

- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.

- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.

- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.

- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.

- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #8

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice comparing and contrasting using Venn diagrams.

- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.

- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.

- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.

- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.

- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.

- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.

- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #9

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice finding and identifying main ideas.

- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.
- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.
- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.
- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.
- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.
- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #10

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice the sequencing of events in a story.
- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.
- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.
- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.
- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.
- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.
- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #11

- Language arts skills that will be addressed this week during regular language arts time: Teacher will explain, demonstrate, and allow students to practice recognizing words using background knowledge/experiences and semantic clues.

- A guest reader will visit the classroom one time this week for a period of approximately fifteen minutes.
- Teacher will allow class time for daily oral reading to be done by the teacher on days when there are not any guest readers.
- Teacher will allow class time for a weekly visit to the school library.
- Teacher will administer a comprehension assessment on the assigned classroom reading.
- Each student will complete and turn in three literature response stems in his or her reading log by Friday during class time.
- Teacher will score the assignments given to each student by using the rubrics.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #12

- Teacher will administer the Motivational Interest Survey post-test.
- Teacher will administer the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development as a post-test.
- Teachers will discuss results of research with parents at conferences.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK # 13

- Teachers will gather data from the survey and checklist to compare with the pre-tests given in week #2.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

WEEK #14

- Teachers will collate and graph results gathered from the research project.
- Teacher will complete weekly journal.

Methods of Assessment

To begin and end the intervention period, a Motivational Interest Survey was given to assess student interest and knowledge about reading. A Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development was also given to identify the skills that each student has learned previously. These two methods were given in a pre- and post-test format. During the intervention, students completed weekly comprehension assessment quizzes that tracked their growth and progress. They also completed a reading log each week that included titles, reflections, and amount of time-spent reading. The latter two assessments were scored using a rubric (Appendix H, Appendix I) that the researchers developed. All of these assessments were administered according to grade level abilities.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The first objective of this project was to increase student appreciation of and motivation for reading as measured by a review of the Motivational Interest surveys and the completion of weekly reading logs. In order to accomplish this objective, the researchers created and implemented the use of weekly reading logs and reflection journals for individual students. In addition, the researchers scheduled time for daily oral reading in the classroom by the teacher or guest reader and allowed class time to visit the school library each week.

The second objective of this project was to increase student language arts skills as measured by a review of weekly comprehension assessments and the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development. In order to accomplish this objective, the researchers selected specific grade appropriate language arts skills on which to focus each week and completed weekly comprehension assessments.

As part of the plan the researchers implemented a Motivational Interest Survey as a pre-test to assess each student's interest in reading. In addition, the researchers

administered a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, which was broken down into two components: Concepts of Print and Comprehension of Text. All three pre-tests were scored using percentages of students at each grade level that performed the tasks on the basis of frequently, occasionally, and rarely. Researchers demonstrated a sample reading log, and students were assessed using a rubric for their weekly entries.

Each week, the researchers focused on a particular language arts skill. These included: phonetic skills, critical listening and thinking, predicting, context clues, comparison and contrast, identifying main ideas, sequencing, and word recognition using background knowledge. Guest readers, which included parents, administrators, and other school staff members, were invited into the classroom each week to read for at least fifteen minutes.

At the end of the eleven-week intervention, students were given a Motivational Interest Survey post-test and a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development as a post-test. The researchers recorded the results at each grade level.

Researchers administered pre-tests at Sites A and B. The first pre-test, a Motivational Interest Survey, was administered to three grade levels: Kindergarten, fourth, and sixth grades. At the Kindergarten level, the researcher administered the Motivational Interest Survey on a one on one basis with each student. The researchers at the fourth and sixth grade levels allowed students to read and complete the survey on their own. When compiling the pre-test data, the researchers condensed the survey to include the six questions that most accurately correlated with the objectives of the project.

The second pre-test, a Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, was also administered to the three grade levels described above. The checklist was broken down into two sections: Concepts of Print and Comprehension of Text. At the Kindergarten level, the researcher completed the two sections of the checklist using observations in the classroom over several days. At the fourth grade level, students were questioned individually by the researcher on the Concepts of Print portion, while the Comprehension of Text portion was completed by the individual student during class time. Sixth grade students completed both portions of the checklist individually during class time. At the fourth and sixth grade levels, the skill of identifying letters was evaluated in the context of knowing that words are made up of letters, and the skill of identifying words was evaluated in the context of knowing that sentences are made up of words. There were no modifications to the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development by the researcher at the Kindergarten level. However, the researchers at the fourth and sixth grade levels adapted the checklist to correspond the assessment to the current language arts story.

The post-tests for both the Motivational Interest Survey and Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development were administered by the researchers in the same manner as the pre-tests, with the following exceptions: the fourth grade students were allowed to individually complete both portions of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development, and the fourth and sixth grade classes adapted the checklist to once again correspond the assessment to the current language arts story.

There were several deviations from the Action Plan at the Kindergarten level due to factors such as age, individual ability level, and time of year. These deviations included: the completion of a class reading log as opposed to individual student logs, the

use of pictoral responses to reading stems as opposed to the use of written language as sentences or as labels on the drawings, and the reading log rubric was not consistently used to assess the pictoral responses due to their completion during class time. At the fourth grade level, the reading log rubric was not consistently used to assess the literature response stems. The researchers at the sixth grade level did not deviate from the Action Plan.

The reading log rubric was not consistently used at the Kindergarten and fourth grade levels because the researchers used their own individual discretion on the use of the rubric on a weekly basis. These researchers chose to eliminate this weekly assessment, as it was not needed to track the progress of the research subjects. Due to the pre-test/post-test format that the action research project followed, time constraints, and curriculum responsibilities of the researchers, it was realized that the data from the rubric was not needed to track the progress of the research subjects since weekly progress was not documented.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

On both the pre- and post-test Motivational Interest Survey, students could respond in one of three ways. Responses of "frequently" or "occasionally" were viewed as positive, while "rarely" was viewed as negative.

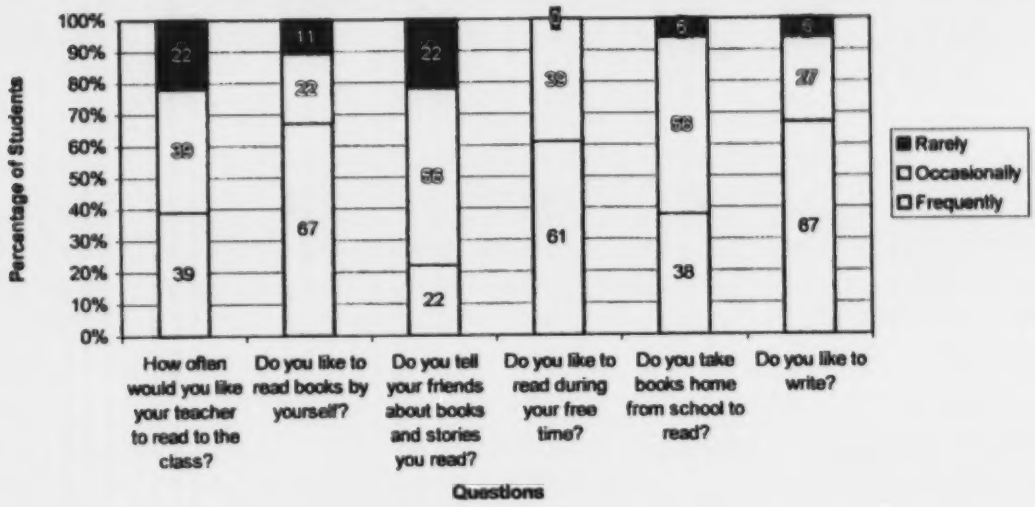

Figure 4.1. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Motivational Interest Survey pre-test.

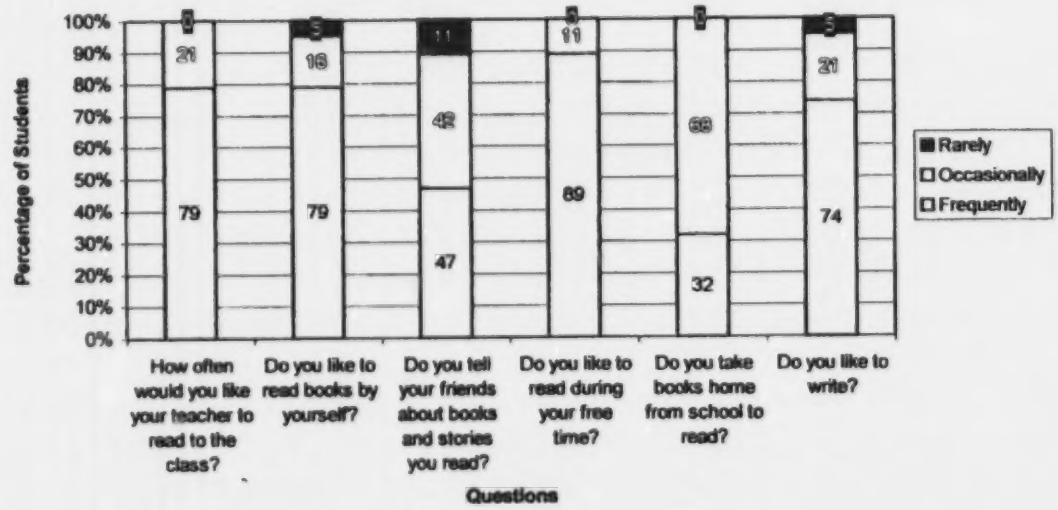

Figure 4.2. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Motivational Interest Survey post-test.

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The Motivational Interest Survey was administered to Kindergarten students as a pre-test and post-test. When asked, "How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?" 78% of Kindergarteners responded in a positive manner on the pre-test, while 100% replied positively on the post-test. On the pre-test, 89% of these students responded positively to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" whereas 95% had a positive response on the post-test. In regard to the question, "Do you tell your friends about books and stories that you read?" 78% responded positively on the pre-test, while 89% responded positively on the post-test. When asked, "Do you like to read during your free time?" 100% responded in a positive manner on both the pre-test and the post-test. Ninety-four percent of students responded positively to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" on the pre-test, while 100% responded positively on the post-test. In regard to the question, "Do you like to write?" 94% responded positively on the pre-test, while 95% responded positively on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the Kindergarten data between the pre and post-tests. When looking to the question, "How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?" there was a 40% increase in responses of "frequently", from a percentage of 39% on the pre-test to 79% on the post-test. A second significant change was seen in response to the question, "Do you like to read during your free time?" 28% more students responded "frequently" on the post-test.

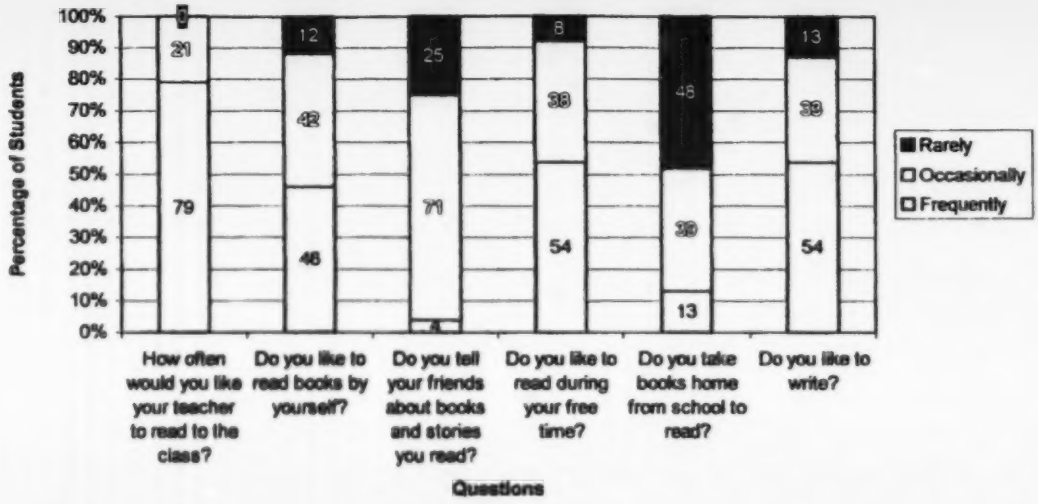

Figure 4.3. Responses by fourth grade students on the Motivational Interest Survey pre-test.

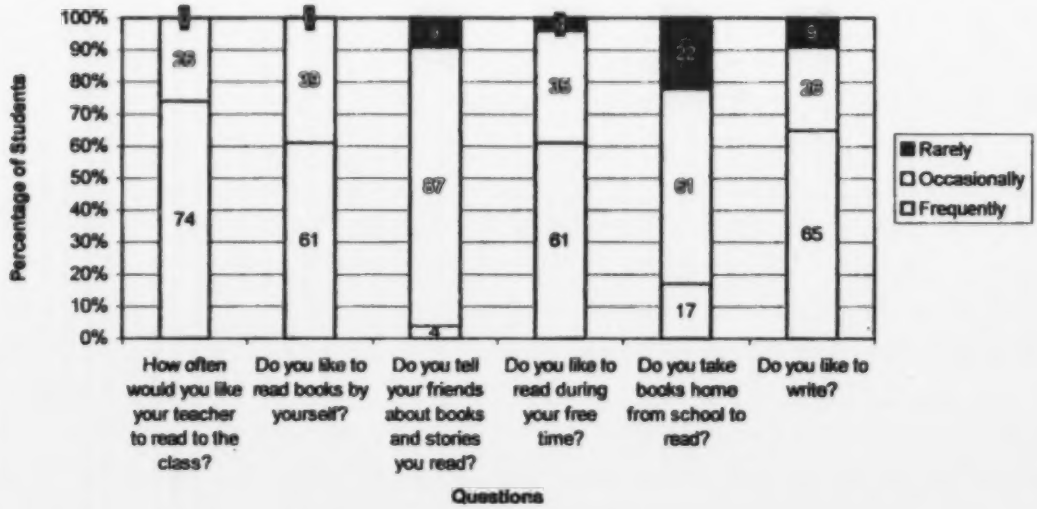

Figure 4.4. Responses by fourth grade students on the Motivational Interest Survey post-test.

The Motivational Interest Survey was administered to fourth grade students as a pre-test and post-test. When asked, "How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?" 100% of fourth graders responded in a positive manner on the pre-test and

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post-test. On the pre-test, 88% of these students responded positively to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" whereas 100% had a positive response on the post-test. In regard to the question, "Do you tell your friends about books and stories that you read?" 75% responded positively on the pre-test, while 91% responded positively on the post-test. When asked, "Do you like to read during your free time?" 92% responded in a positive manner on the pre-test, and 96% responded positively on the post-test. Fifty-two percent of students responded positively to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" on the pre-test, while 78% responded positively on the post-test. In regard to the question, "Do you like to write?" 87% responded positively on the pre-test, while 91% responded positively on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the fourth grade data between the pre and post-tests. When looking to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" 88% of fourth graders responded positively on the pre-test, while 100% of the fourth graders responded positively on the post-test. A second significant change was seen in response to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" 52% of students responded positively on the pre-test, while 78% responded positively on the post-test. This resulted in a 26% increase in positive responses by the students on the post-test.

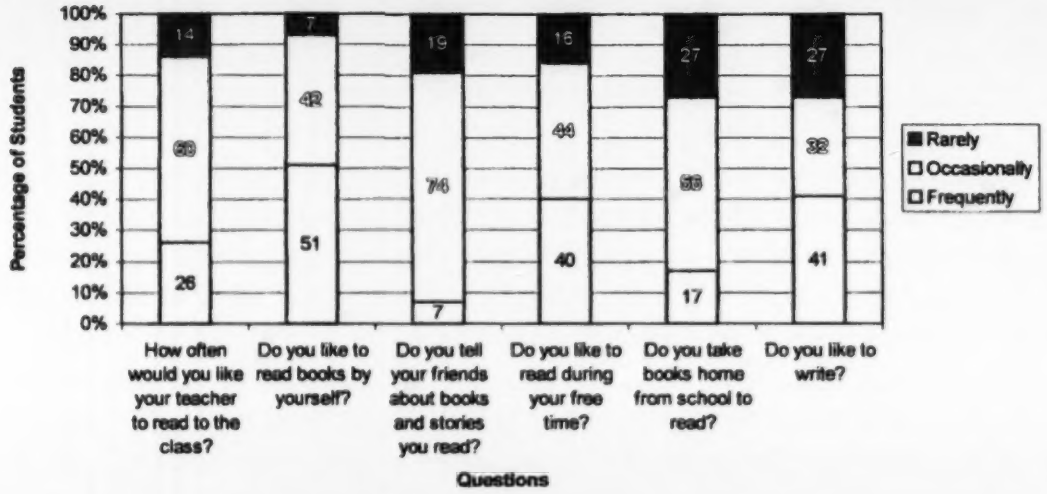

Figure 4.5. Responses by sixth grade students on the Motivational Interest Survey pre-test.

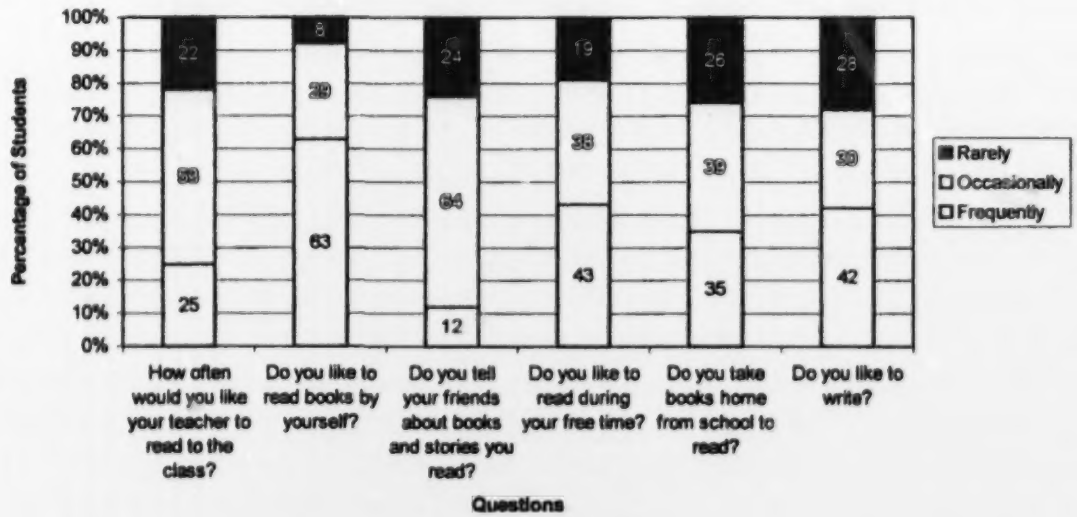

Figure 4.6. Responses by sixth grade students on the Motivational Interest Survey post-test.

The Motivational Interest Survey was administered to sixth grade students as a pre-test and post-test. When asked, "How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?" 86% of sixth graders responded in a positive manner on the pre-test, and 78% responded positively on the post-test. On the pre-test, 93% of these students responded

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positively to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" whereas 92% had a positive response on the post-test. In regard to the question, "Do you tell your friends about books and stories that you read?" 81% responded positively on the pre-test, while 76% responded positively on the post-test. When asked, "Do you like to read during your free time?" 84% responded in a positive manner on the pre-test, and 81% responded positively on the post-test. Seventy-three percent of students responded positively to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" on the pre-test, while 74% responded positively on the post-test. In regard to the question, "Do you like to write?" 73% responded positively on the pre-test, while 72% responded positively on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the sixth grade data between the pre and post-tests. When looking to the question, "Do you like to read books by yourself?" there was a 12% increase in the response of "frequently" from the pre-test (51%) to the post-test (63%) data. A second significant change was seen in response to the question, "Do you take books home from school to read?" There was an approximate 50% increase in the "frequent" response on the post-test as compared to the pre-test data.

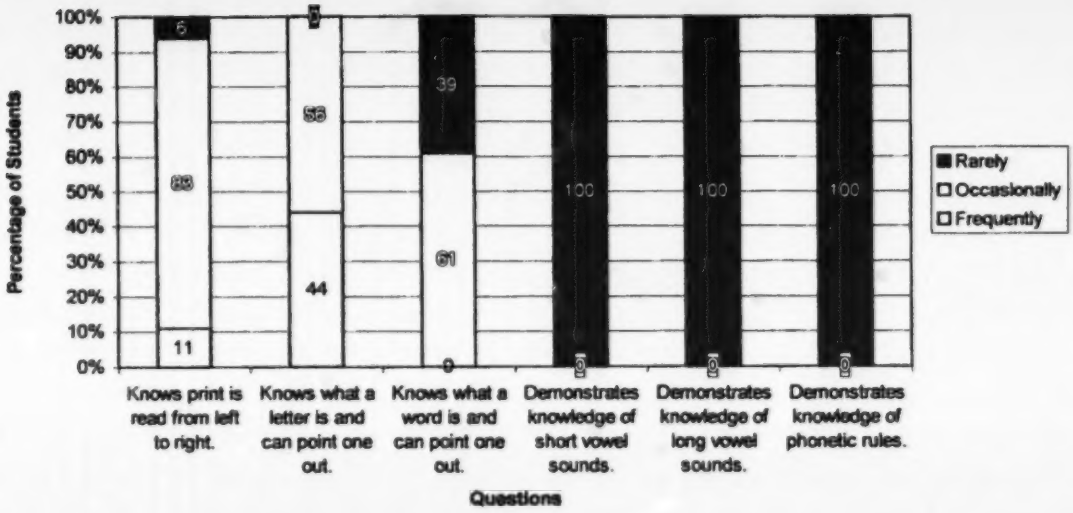

Figure 4.7. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Concepts of Print pre-test.

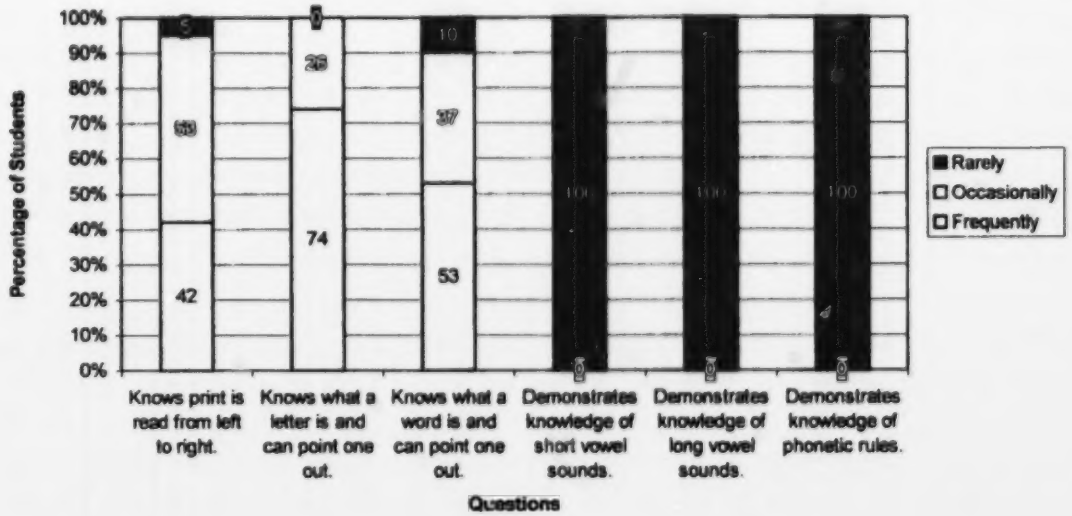

Figure 4.8. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Concepts of Print post-test.

The Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development was administered to Kindergarten students as a pre-test and post-test. The

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researcher determined the areas of "frequently" and "occasionally" as acceptable responses. On the pre-test, 94% of students knew that print is read from left to right on an acceptable level, while 95% of students scored at the acceptable level on the post-test. On the observable skill of knowing and identifying letters, 100% of students scored on an acceptable level on the pre and post-tests. Sixty-one percent of students achieved an acceptable level on the skill of knowing what a word is and identifying a word on the pre-test, while 90% scored at the acceptable level on the post-test. One hundred percent of Kindergarten students demonstrated no knowledge of phonemic awareness, as shown in the final three questions of the pre and post-tests.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the Kindergarten data between the pre and post-tests. When evaluating the skill of knowing that print is read from left to right, there was a 31% increase in the "frequently" level from the pre to the post-test. The second notable change that the researchers identified was in the skill of knowing what a word is and pointing one out, with an increase of 53% in the "frequently" level from the pre to the post-test.

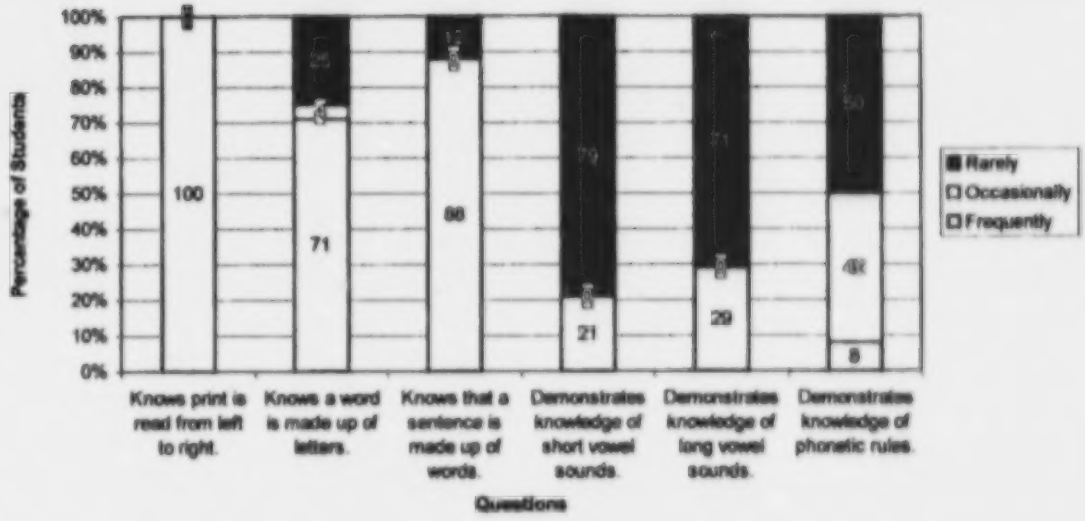

Figure 4.9. Responses by fourth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Concepts of Print pre-test.

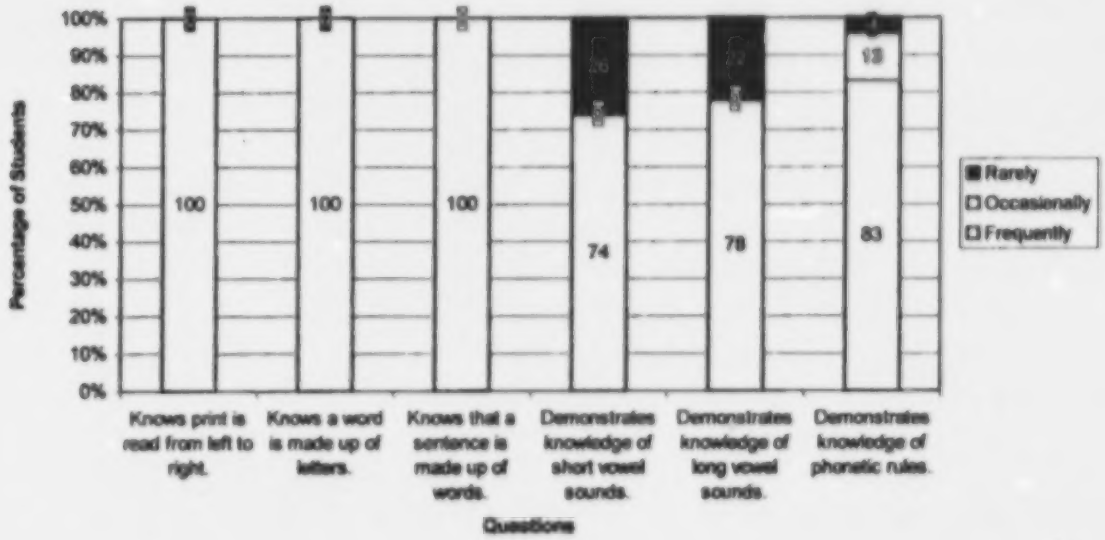

Figure 4.10. Responses by fourth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Concepts of Print post-test.

The Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development was administered to fourth grade students as a pre-test and post-test. The

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researcher determined the areas of "frequently" and "occasionally" as acceptable responses. One hundred percent of students knew that print is read from left to right on an acceptable level for both the pre and post-tests. On the observable skill of knowing a word is made up of letters, 75% of students scored on an acceptable level on the pre–test, with 100% of students scoring at an acceptable level on the post-test. Eighty-eight percent of students achieved an acceptable level on the skill of knowing that a sentence is made up of words on the pre-test, while 100% scored at the acceptable level on the post-test. Twenty-one percent of fourth grade students demonstrated acceptable knowledge of short vowel sounds on the pre-test, while 74% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test. Twenty-nine percent of fourth grade students demonstrated acceptable knowledge of long vowel sounds on the pre-test, while 78% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test. When fourth grade students were evaluated on the knowledge of phonetic rules, 50% of students demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the pre-test, while 96% of students scored at this level on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the fourth grade data between the pre and post-tests on the Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development. The greatest gains were in the areas of phonemic awareness. There was a 50-75% increase in the acceptable levels in each of the three areas pertaining to phonetics: demonstrates knowledge of short vowel sounds, demonstrates knowledge of long vowel sounds, and demonstrates knowledge of phonetic rules.

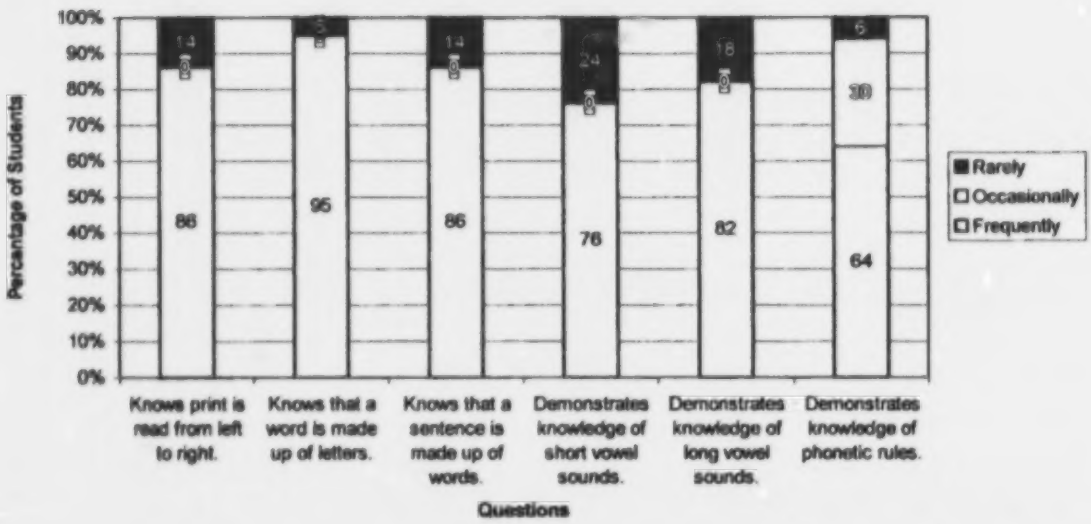

Figure 4.11. Responses by sixth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Concepts of Print pre-test.

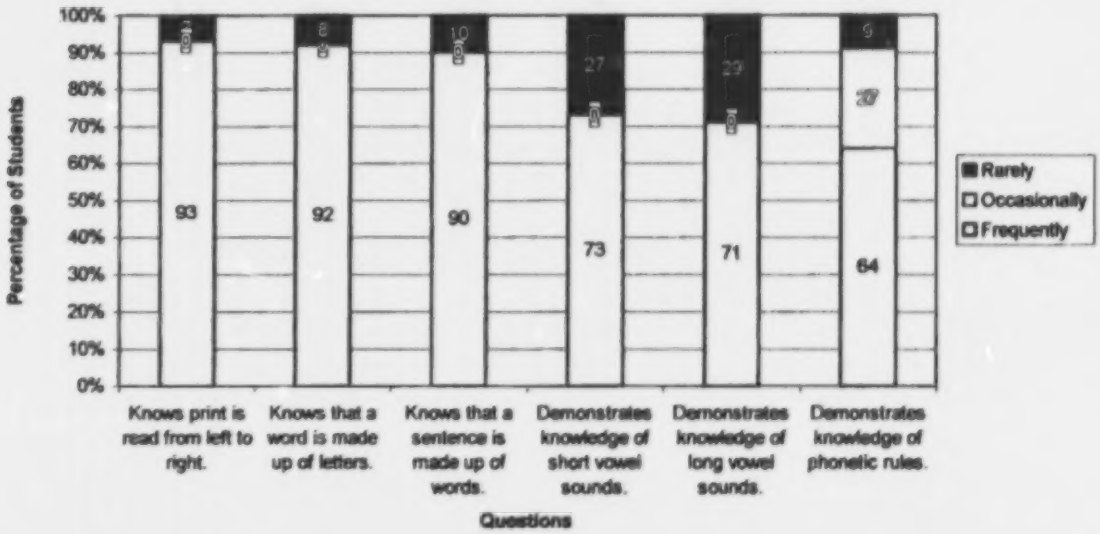

Figure 4.12. Responses by sixth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Concepts of Print post-test.

The Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development was administered to sixth grade students as a pre-test and post-test. The

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researcher determined the areas of "frequently" and "occasionally" as acceptable responses. Eighty-six percent of students knew that print is read from left to right on an acceptable level for both the pre-tests, and 93% on the post-test. On the observable skill of knowing a word is made up of letters, 95% of students scored on an acceptable level on the pre–test, with 92% of students scoring at an acceptable level on the post-test. Eighty-six percent of students achieved an acceptable level on the skill of knowing that a sentence is made up of words on the pre-test, while 90% scored at the acceptable level on the post-test. Seventy-six percent of sixth grade students demonstrated acceptable knowledge of short vowel sounds on the pre-test, while 73% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test. Eighty-two percent of sixth grade students demonstrated acceptable knowledge of long vowel sounds on the pre-test, while 71% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test. When sixth grade students were evaluated on the knowledge of phonetic rules, 94% of students demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the pre-test, while 91% of students scored at this level on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the sixth grade data between the pre and post-tests on the Concepts of Print section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development. There were slight increases in the skill levels of the sixth grade students from the pre to post-tests in the skill areas of knowing that print is read from left to right, and knowing that a sentence is made up of words. There were slight decreases seen in the sixth grade levels of knowledge of short and long vowel sounds.

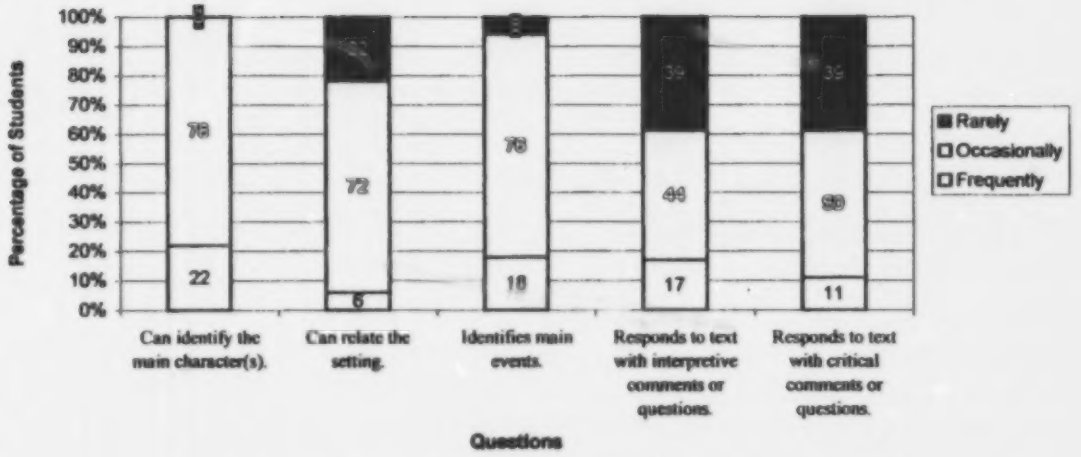

Figure 4.13. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Comprehension of Text pre-test.

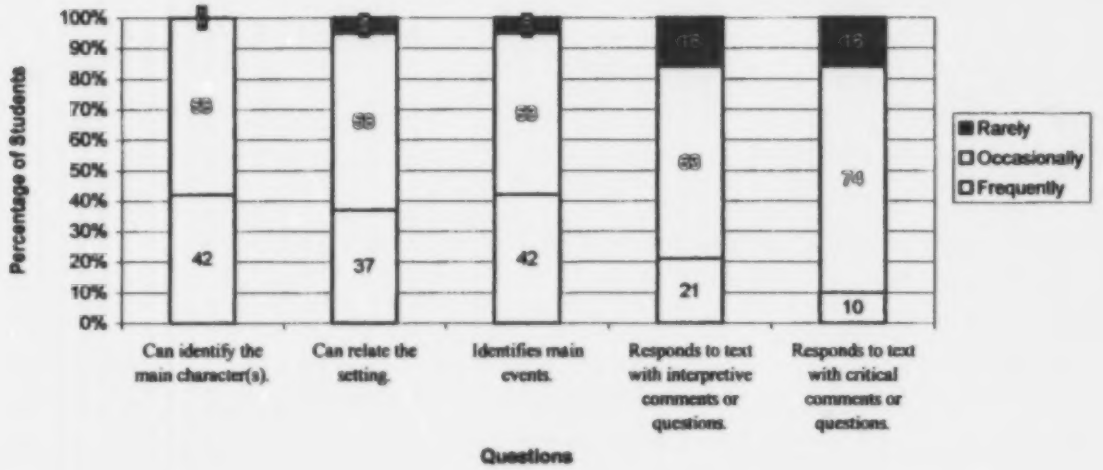

Figure 4.14. Responses by Kindergarten students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Comprehension of Text post-test.

The Comprehension of Text section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development was administered to Kindergarten students as a pre-test and post-test. The researcher determined the areas of "frequently" and "occasionally" as acceptable

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responses. One hundred percent of students could identify main characters on an acceptable level for both the pre-test and the post-test. On the ability of relating the setting, 78% of students scored on an acceptable level on the pre–test, with 95% of students scoring at an acceptable level on the post-test. Ninety-four percent of students achieved an acceptable level on the skill of identifying main events on the pre-test, while 95% scored at the acceptable level on the post-test. Sixty-one percent of Kindergarten students responded with interpretive questions or comments to text on the pre-test, while 84% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test. Sixty-one percent of Kindergarten students responded with critical comments or questions to text on the pre-test, while 84% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the Kindergarten data between the pre and post-tests on the Comprehension of Text section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development. Students demonstrated an increase of 31% in the skill of relating the setting in the post-test data. There was a 24% increase in the "frequently" response in the skill of identifying main events in the story on the post-test.

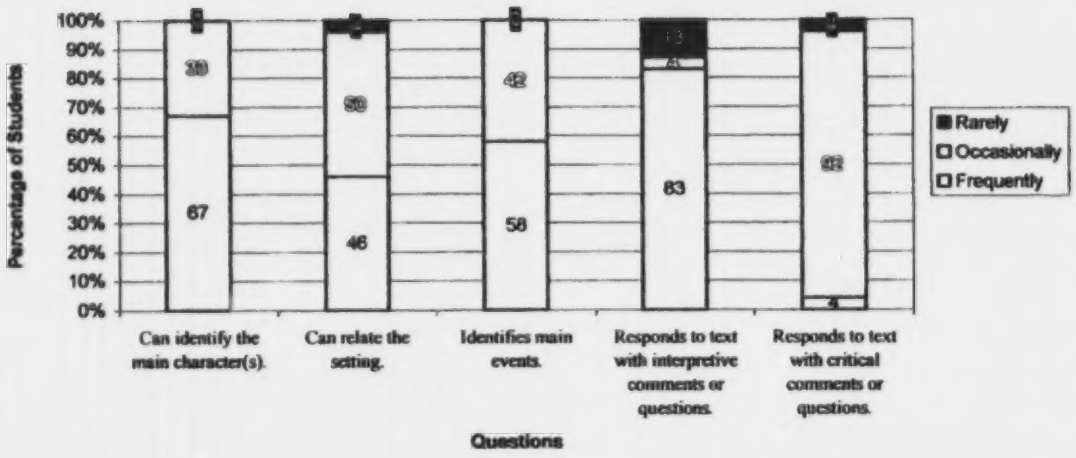

Figure 4.15. Responses by fourth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Comprehension of Text pre-test.

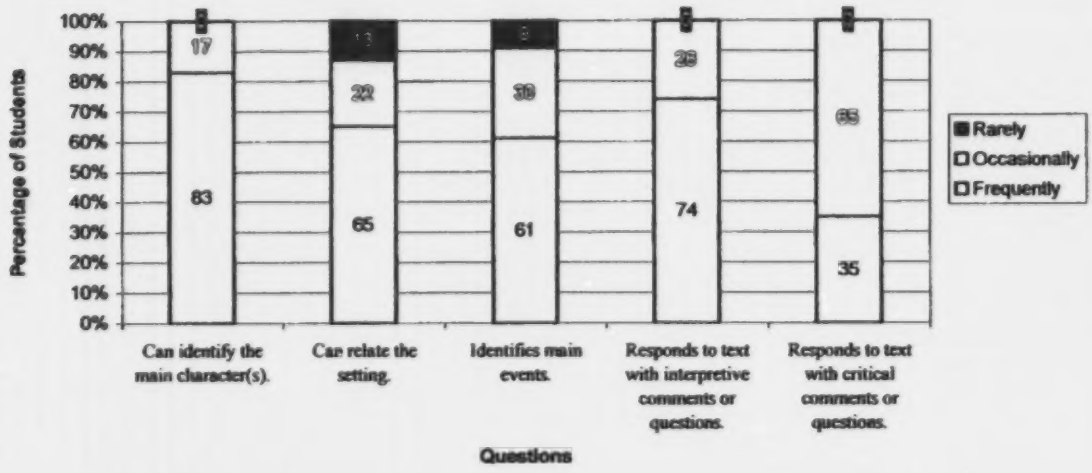

Figure 4.16. Responses by fourth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Comprehension of Text post-test.

The Comprehension of Text section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development was administered to fourth grade students as a pre-test and post-test. The researcher determined the areas of "frequently" and "occasionally" as acceptable

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responses. One hundred percent of students could identify main characters on an acceptable level for both the pre-test and the post-test. On the ability of relating the setting, 96% of students scored on an acceptable level on the pre–test, with 87% of students scoring at an acceptable level on the post-test. One hundred percent of students achieved an acceptable level on the skill of identifying main events on the pre-test, while 91% scored at the acceptable level on the post-test. Eighty-seven percent of fourth grade students responded with interpretive questions or comments to text on the pre-test, while 100% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test. Ninety-six percent of fourth grade students responded with critical comments or questions to text on the pre-test, while 100% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the fourth grade data between the pre and post-tests on the Comprehension of Text section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development. In terms of the ability to relate the setting, there was an increase of 19% in the response of "frequently." There was a 31% increase in the response of "frequently" in the skill level of responding to the text with critical comments or questions.

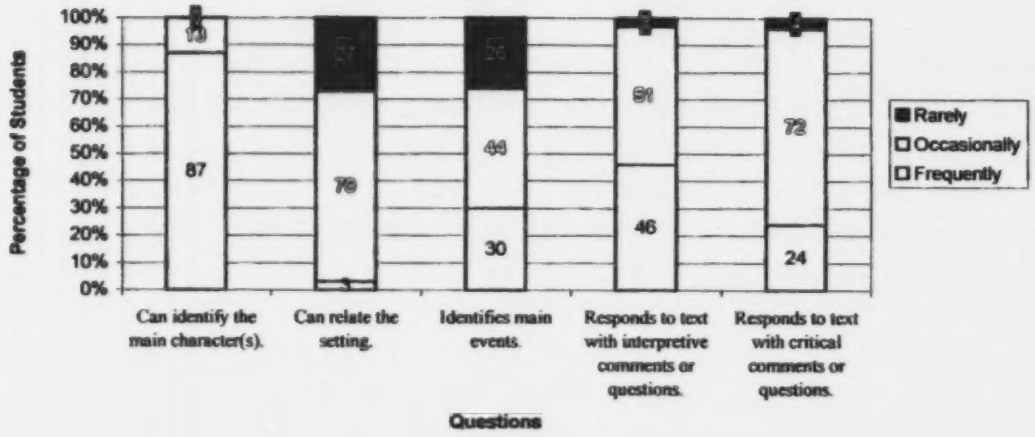

Figure 4.17. Responses by sixth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Comprehension of Text pre-test.

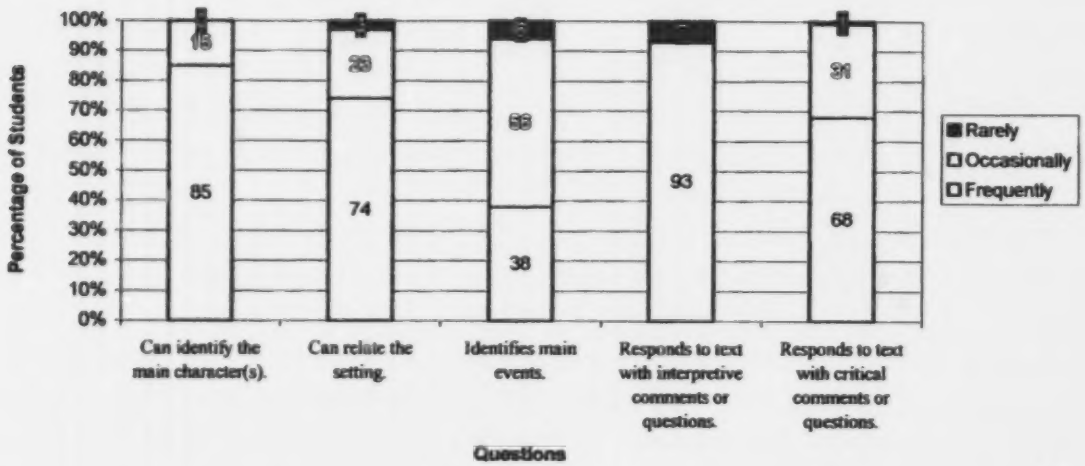

Figure 4.18 Responses by sixth grade students on the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development: Comprehension of Text post-test.

The Comprehension of Text section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development was administered to sixth grade students as a pre-test and post-test. The

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researcher determined the areas of "frequently" and "occasionally" as acceptable responses. One hundred percent of students could identify main characters on an acceptable level for both the pre-test and the post-test. On the ability of relating the setting, 73% of students scored on an acceptable level on the pre–test, with 97% of students scoring at an acceptable level on the post-test. Seventy-four percent of students achieved an acceptable level on the skill of identifying main events on the pre-test, while 94% scored at the acceptable level on the post-test. Ninety-seven percent of fourth grade students responded with interpretive questions or comments to text on the pre-test, while 93% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test. Ninety-six percent of fourth grade students responded with critical comments or questions to text on the pre-test, while 99% demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge on the post-test.

The researchers found the following notable changes in the sixth grade data between the pre and post-tests on the Comprehension of Text section of the Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development. There was a 71% increase in the area of "frequently" in the skill of relating the setting on the post-test data. There was a 47% increase in the "frequently" responses for the skill of making interpretive comments or questions in response to the text on the post-test.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on language arts skills, most students showed a marked improvement. The classroom implementations of a weekly visit from a guest reader, daily oral reading, weekly visits to the library, weekly lessons on specific grade appropriate language arts skills, and the completion of reading logs have appeared to improve student achievement.

The researchers at the Kindergarten and fourth grade levels found it difficult to balance the existing curriculum components with the implementation of the Action Plan. Since these classrooms are self-contained, these researchers expected to have more time to fit in additional activities to the daily classroom routines, while in reality the researchers found the opposite to be true. The researchers at these grade levels found it difficult to restrict the action research activities to a designated time frame. The researchers at the sixth grade level, however, found it much easier to accomplish the weekly expectations from the Action Plan, because they were aware of what their students were able to complete within one class period. The researchers at the sixth grade level were also able to better apply the weekly data that was collected when assessing students and assigning grades.

The researchers at Site A, in the Kindergarten and fourth grade classrooms, observed an increase in personal motivation to look at books and listen to stories in the classroom. Students were excited to have guest readers visit classrooms on a weekly basis. Weekly visits to the library also increased motivation and interest in reading. There was an increase in the skill level of the students who participated in the study when looking to language arts skills, such as those analyzed in the Checklist for Literacy Development. These increases may have been due to a greater focus on the language arts skills that were focused on throughout the intervention, but they may also have increased due to maturity levels and time spent in the classroom throughout the first half of the school year.

The researchers at Site B, in the sixth grade classrooms, noticed excitement in the students when guest readers were scheduled to appear in the researchers' classrooms.

The intervention appeared to motivate the students to keep challenging themselves with new books. Students were enthusiastic about visiting the library and choosing their own reading material. Throughout the intervention, student writing improved through the use and completion of response stems in reading logs and comprehension assessment sheets. The intervention has appeared to increase students' critical and interpretive comments about their reading. Typically, motivation toward school is not as high at the sixth grade level as it is at the lower grades.

The researchers plan to continue to implement several portions of this Action Research Project in their regular classroom curriculum. At the Kindergarten level, the researcher would continue to use guest readers, weekly visits to the school library, and a class reading log. The researcher at the fourth grade level would continue to use guest readers, weekly visits to the school library, and occasional use of individual student reading logs. At the sixth grade level, the researchers would continue to use guest readers; bi-monthly visits to the library, and individual student reading logs. The sixth grade teachers also noted that students seemed to benefit from occasional review of various language arts skills and would continue to focus on these occasionally in addition to their regular curriculum.

If further research were to be done, the researchers feel that more emphasis should be placed on the language arts skills that are being taught each week. In hindsight, the researchers at the elementary level devoted more time and energy to increasing student motivation as opposed to practicing and applying the language arts skills. Due to the structured schedule at the middle school level, the researchers were better able to balance the components of the two objectives.

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Appendix A

Name_____
Date_____

Motivational Interest Survey

Directions: Please circle the best answer to each question.

How often would you like your teacher to read to the class?
(2) every day (1) almost every day (0) not often

Do you like to read books by yourself?
(2) yes (1) it's ok (0) no

Which would you most like to have?
(2) a new book (1) a new game (0) new clothes

Do you tell your friends about books and stories you read?
(2) a lot (1) sometimes (0) never

How do you feel when you read out loud to someone?
(2) good (1) ok (0) bad

Do you like to read during your free time?
(2) yes (1) it's ok (0) I don't read in my free time

If someone gave you a book for a present, how would you feel?
(2) happy (1) ok (0) not very happy, disappointed

Do you take storybooks home from school to read
(2) almost every day (1) sometimes (0) not often

Do you read books out loud to someone in your family?
(2) almost every day (1) sometimes (0) not often

What kind of reader are you
(2) I'm a very good reader (1) I'm ok (0) I'm not very good

Learning to read is:
(2) easy (1) a little hard (0) really hard

Do you like to write?
(2) yes (1) it's ok (0) I'd rather do something else

Do you write in your free time?
(2) a lot (1) a little (0) not at all

What do you like to read best?
(2) books and magazines (1) schoolwork (0) nothing

Appendix B

Name_____

Date_____

Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development

Comprehension of Text (using comprehension sample to evaluate)	Always	Sometimes	Never
Can identify the main character(s).			
Can relate the setting.			
Identifies main events.			
Responds to text after reading or listening with literal comments or questions.			
Responds to text after reading or listening with interpretive comments or questions.			
Responds to text after reading or listening with critical comments or questions.			
Concepts about Print	**Always**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Knows print is read from left to right.			
Knows that oral language can be written down and then read.			
Knows what a letter is and can point one out on a printed page.			
Knows what a word is			

Appendix B

(page 2)

and can point one out on a printed page.			
Associates consonants and their initial and final sounds.			
Associates consonant blends with the sounds (bl, cr, fl, dr, gl, pr, st)			
Demonstrates knowledge of the following phonic generalization: in a consonant-vowe-consonant pattern, the vowel sound is usually short.			
Demonstrates knowledge of the following phonic generalization: In a vowel-consonant-e pattern, the vowel is usually long.			
Demonstrates knowledge of the following phonic generalization: When 2 vowels come together in a word, the first is usually long and the second is silent (train, receive, bean).			

Appendix C

Literacy Development Checklist – Phonics Part

1. Which way is print read? _____

2. Can oral language be written down and read? _____

3. What is a word made up of? _____

4. What is a sentence made up of? _____

5. In a consonant-vowel-consonant pattern, is the vowel sound long or short? _____

6. In a vowel-consonant-e pattern, is the vowel usually long or short? _____

7. In these words: train, receive, and bean, is the first vowel usually long, short, or silent? _____

   What is the second vowel? _____

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Appendix D

Literacy Development Checklist

1.Who are the main characters in the story?

2. What is the setting of the story?

3.List the main events in the story?

4.How did the rat treat the beetle when they met?

5.What thoughts or questions do you have about the story?

6.What kind of friend do you think the parrot or beetle would make?

Appendix E

Literacy Development Checklist – Story Elements

1. Who are the main characters in "Mr. Tumnus"?

2. What is the setting of the story?

3. List the main events in "Mr. Tumnus".

4. Describe how Lucy discovered Narnia.

5. What thoughts or questions do you have about what will happen to Mr. Tumnus next?

6. What kind of a friend would Mr. Tumnus or Lucy make?

Appendix F

Literacy Development Checklist

1.Who are the main characters in the story?

2. What is the setting of the story?

3.List the main events in the story?

4.When Mrs. Stanton was a young girl, how did her father treat her?

5.What thoughts or questions do you have about the story?

6.What kind of a friend do you think Cordelia would make?

Appendix G

Checklist for Assessing Literacy Development-Comprehensjon of Text

1. Who are the main characters in "*The Egypt Game*"?

2. What is the setting of the story?

3. List the main events in "The Egypt Game".

4. Describe how April, Melanie, and Marshall discovered Egypt.

5. What thoughts or questions do you have about what will happen next?

6. What kind of a friend would April or Melanie make?

Rubric

Comprehension Assessment Rubric

Created by:

Date 6/28/2002

	Emerging	Progressing	Proficient
Main Character(s)	No main character named	Named some of the main characters	Named all of the main characters
Setting	Read a different book than the class	Partial relation of the setting	Correct relation of the setting
Main Events	Could relate one event from the story	Could relate two events that happened in the story	Could relate at least three events that happened in the story (beginning, middle, end)
Predicting	Illogical	Somewhat logical	Logical
Total			

Rubric

Reading Log Rubric

Created by:

Date 6/28/2002

	Amateur	Acceptable	Awesome
Completion of 3 Stems	Completed 1 stem or less	Completed 2 stems	Completed all 3 stems
Appropriate Responses to the Literature	K- 1 Appropriate picture response 4th- Only 1 stem was completed 6th- 1 Sentence for each stem	K- 2 Appropriate picture responses 4th- 1 Sentence for each of 2 stems 6th- 2 Sentences for each of 2 stems	K- 3 Appropriate picture responses 4th- 1 Sentence for each of 3 stems 6th- 3 Sentences for each of 3 stems
Written Structure of Responses	K- 1 Picture with label attempted 4th- 1 Complete sentence 6th- 3 Complete sentences	K- 2 Pictures with label attempted 4th- 2 Complete sentences 6th- 6 Complete sentences	K- 3 Pictures with labels attempted 4th- 3 Complete sentences 6th- 9 Complete sentences
Total			

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